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UM lecture will discuss the physics of Star Trek

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UM LECTURE WILL DISCUSS THE PHYSICS OF STAR TREK

MISSOULA--

For the crew of the starship Enterprise, destroying a Klingon spacecraft with photon torpedoes, engaging the warp drive to wing across the galaxy and beaming down to the surface of an unexplored planet are all in a day's work. But could any of this stuff really happen?

A University of Montana professor will try to answer that question with a lecture titled "The Physics of Star Trek" on Tuesday, May 5. Dave Friend, associate professor of physics and astronomy, will present his talk at 7:30 p.m. in UM's Urey Lecture Hall. The lecture is free and open to the public, and it will include Star Trek video clips from the movies and television programs.

"I want to show people that physics can be interesting to people other than physicists," Friend said. "And this time of year -- right before finals -- people need a little comic relief."

He said the futuristic technologies used in Star Trek can be put into three categories of physics: real, extrapolated and made-up. Real physics includes science known to modern civilization -- things like antimatter, which is used in the warp engines and photon torpedoes of Star Trek. Extrapolated physics is suspected by scientists to be theoretically possible -- like the warp engines that allow Star Trek crews to bridge interstellar distances. Made-up physics, like transporters that instantly zap people from place to place, probably aren't feasible.

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Friend, a devout Trekkie, has given lectures about the physics of Star Trek at small science fiction conventions the past two years, but he is trying to reach a larger audience.

"I'm hoping to attract more than just Star Trek fans," he said. "It's fun to show that science fiction is often based on fact."

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